

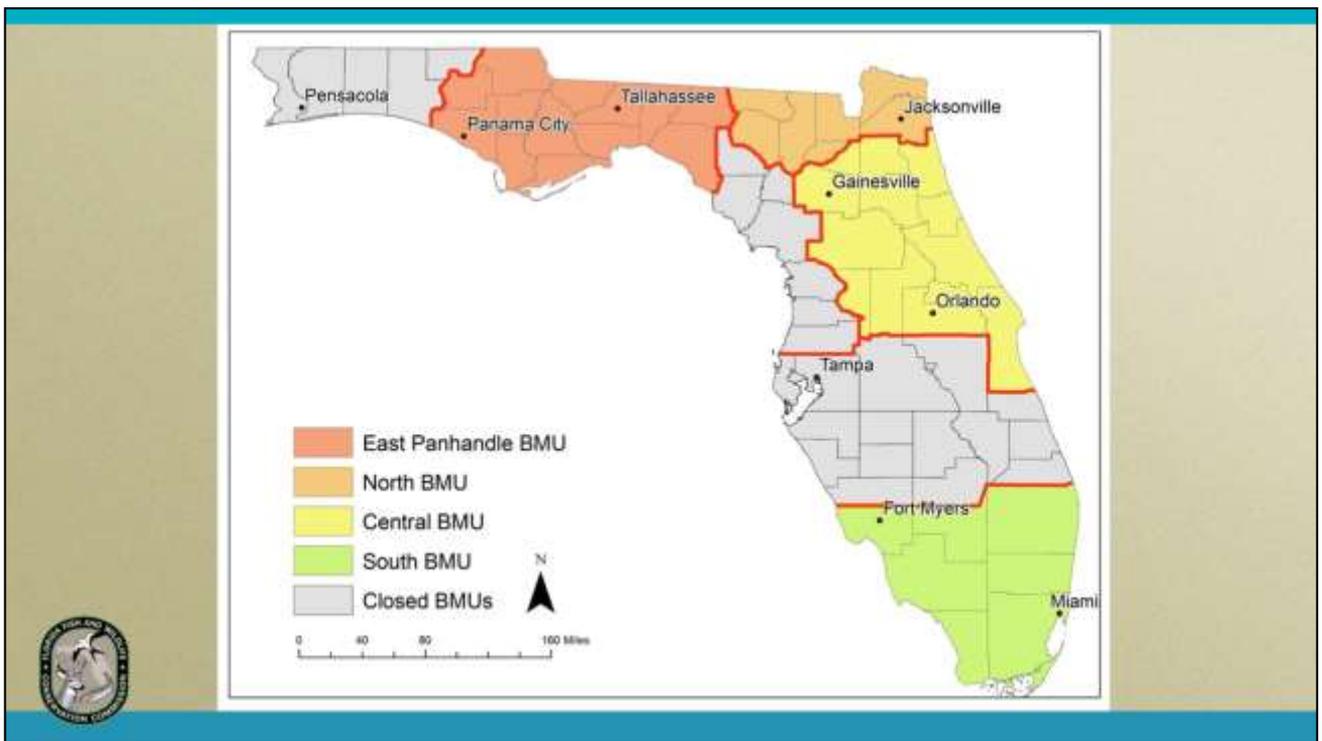


Proposed Harvest Objectives for 2015 Bear Hunt September 2015

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Hunting and Game Management

Version 1

At the June meeting, the Commission approved final rules establishing a bear hunting season for 2015 in four (East Panhandle, North, Central and South) of the seven BMUs. This agenda item is to request approval of bear harvest objectives for the 2015 bear hunting season for the East Panhandle Bear Management Unit (BMU), North BMU, Central BMU, and South BMU.



Hunting opportunities are based on the Bear Management Units (BMUs), as delineated in the 2012 FWC Bear Management Plan. Management goals are for sustainable populations within each Bear Management Unit (BMU) based on the biological characteristics of the subpopulation.

Season will be open in the counties that make up 4 BMUs:

East Panhandle BMU – Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, and Washington counties.

North BMU – Baker, Columbia, Duval, Hamilton, Nassau, Suwannee, and Union counties.

Central BMU – Alachua, Bradford, Brevard, Clay, Flagler, Lake, Marion, Orange, Putnam, Seminole, St. Johns, Sumter, and Volusia counties.

South BMU – Broward, Collier, Hendry, Lee, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties.

These BMUs will be open for hunting because they have bear populations that are large enough to sustain a limited harvest: more than 200 bears according to the most recent (2002 or 2014) estimates. Bear hunting will be legal on private land and on some public lands in these BMUs.

Proposed Harvest Objectives, 2015

Goal: Stabilizing Populations

Bear Management Unit	Population Estimate	20% of Population Estimate	Known Mortality (Avg.)	Harvest Objective
E. Panhandle (2002)	600	120	80	40
North (2014)	550	110	10	100
Central (2014)	1,300	260	160	100
South (2002)	700	140	20	80*



This slide shows the four Bear Management Units that will be open for bear hunting in 2015 and illustrates the process staff used for developing harvest objectives for each area. The population estimates are the most recent ones available, resulting from studies in 2002 (East Panhandle and South) and 2014 (North and Central). The FWC would like to stabilize the bear population in these four units and therefore seeks to achieve 20% total mortality in each population. The proposed harvest objective takes 20% of the population estimate and then subtracts from that the recent average of annual known mortality. Annual known mortality includes the number of bears hit and killed by cars as well as the number of bears that the FWC captures and kills for conflict behavior. Because of annual variation in those numbers, we used an average of the last 3 years for both vehicle strikes and conflict-related removals to estimate the non-hunting mortality for 2015. The harvest objective for the South BMU was reduced to take into account that the Big Cypress National Preserve (i.e., Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area) would not be open for hunting as early as 2015.

How is Harvest Limited? Conservative Season Structure

- **Season length**
 - 7 days is short
- **Bag limit**
 - 1 bear per hunter
- **Methods of take**
 - No bait or dogs
- **BMU-specific objectives, daily harvest monitoring and cutoff on days 3-7**
 - Extra measure of limitation



Some concerns have been expressed about FWC issuing an unlimited number of bear hunting permits and the potential for overharvest. The season structure is conservative in numerous ways.

Experience in Other States: Low Hunter Success

- Without use of dogs or bait, seasonal hunter success ranges from 1-12%
 - Percentage of participating hunters who harvest a bear during entire season
 - Examples:
 - Massachusetts: 18-day season, 2% success
 - Pennsylvania: 5-day season, 2% success
 - Maryland: 4-day season, 12% success



Based on experience in other states, the likelihood of exceeding the harvest objectives during the first two days of the season is very low. Ten states and two provinces that have bear hunting seasons do not allow the use of dogs or bait, and their season success rates range from 1 to 12%. After the first two days, the daily cutoff mechanism will control harvest opportunity by potentially closing the season on any given day in an individual BMU based on a running total of bears harvested. Compared to other states, Florida's forested habitats with thick understory work against high hunter success, particularly with the methods allowed.

Desired Outcomes

- Attainment of harvest objectives to stabilize bear populations
- Safe, responsible, sustainable hunting opportunities
- Data to improve future decisions regarding hunting opportunities and population management
 - Hunter effort (how much, where, when, and how)
 - Hunter success (harvest per hunter and per hunter-day)
 - Hunter feedback



Staff Recommendation

- Approve the proposed harvest objectives
- Authorize Executive Director to establish the objectives by Executive Order



The following slides are considered backup material
and are not anticipated to be part of the actual
presentation



